

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

DPW-01 ORM-01 SR-02 IO-10 IGA-01 /074 W

----- 126896

R 210830Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2613

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 1248

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, EAID, LA

SUBJ: PL SHOOTING DOWN OF AID CONTRACT

HELICOPTER

REF: A) STATE 032753

B) VIENTIANE 1193

C) VIENTIANE 1240

D) VIENTIANE 1247

1. WE AGREE WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S POSITION THAT PATHET LAO GLOATING OVER THE SHOOTING DOWN OF THE BIRD AIR HELICOPTER ON JANUARY 18 WARRANTS A STRONG RESPONSE ON OUR PART. ACCORDINGLY, THE AMBASSADOR RAISED THE MATTER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER DURING THEIR FEBRUARY 20 CONVERSATION (REF B). A STRONGLY WORDED NOTE WAS SENT TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY (REF C). THE AMBASSADOR VIGOROUSLY PROTESTED BOTH THE ACTION AND THE RADIO PATHET LAO BROADCAST WHEN HE MET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUMI (REF D) ON FEBRUARY 21.

2. WE DO NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE ISSUE SHOULD BE PUSHED HARDER AT THIS TIME. THE VIENTIANE SIDE WOULD BE MOST RELUCTANT TO TAKE THE ISSUE BEFORE THE JCCIA. THE AREA ALONG THE NORTH BANK OF NAM NGUM LAKE IS ONE IN WHICH PATHET LAO FORCES HAVE IN FACT OPERATED
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FOR MANY YEARS. WHILE THIS AREA IS NOMINALLY WITHIN

THEIR ZONE, THE VIENTIANE SIDE DOES NOT WISH TO CALL ATTENTION TO THEIR PRECARIOUS CONTROL OF THE REGION AND OPEN THEMSELVES TO THE COUNTER-ARGUMENT THAT THE LPF ARE PRESENT IN REASONABLE FORCE AND THEREFORE HAVE A LEGITIMATE CLAIM TO AN ENCLAVE IN THE VIENTIANE ZONE.

3. MORE IMPORTANT FROM OUR STANDPOINT IS THE ABSOLUTE NEED TO MAINTAIN THE PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF AERIAL NAVIGATION. WITH BOTH THE MISSION AND THE VIENTIANE SIDE DEPENDENT ON OUR ABILITY TO FLY ANYWHERE IN THE VIENTIANE ZONE AT ANY TIME, WE CANNOT AFFORD TO GIVE THE PATHET LAO ANY DEVICE BY WHICH THEY CAN CONTROL OUR FLIGHT OPERATIONS. BY TAKING AN OVER-ZEALOUS STAND ON THE SHOOTING DOWN OF THE HELICGYTER WE ALLOW THE LPF THE OPPORTUNITY TO INSTITUTE A SYSTEM OF AIR CORRIDORS OR TO PROPOSE BLANDLY THAT PRIOR NOTIFICATION OF FLIGHTS BE GIVEN SO THAT THEIR UNITS CAN BE ALERTED TO THE FLIGHTS AND ORDERED NOT TO FIRE AT THE PLANES. THROUGH SUBSEQUENT "FRIENDLY GESTURES" LIKE THIS THE LPF COULD SOON CONTROL OUR FLIGHT MOVEMENTS. THIS WOULD BE AN INTOLERABLE SITUATION.

4. THE AMBASSADOR HAS DISCUSSED THIS PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM WITH SENIOR REPRESENTATIVES OF CONTINENTAL AIR SERVICES, INC. THEY COMPLETELY AGREE WITH OUR POSITION THAT FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR THEIR FLIGHTS IS CRUCIAL.
WHITEHOUSE

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